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PHYSICAL CULTURE

By GUSTAV BJORKMAN, M. D.

Per Henrik Ling, the father of the system of Swedish gymnastics, aimed at the development of a harmonious body through his pedagogical gymnastics. Ling's genius led him to success in evolving a gymnastic system, which now nearly a hundred years after its conception is universally recognized as the only form of physical culture useful for educational purposes. To the writer of this article it is not known of any educational department of any civilized government not using the Swedish system, as a means of developing a strong and healthy race physically. Ling's system of medical gymnastics, or, as they are popularly called, "Swedish movements," were to help in the battle against sickness and suffering. Based on scientific principles as a Swedish system of medical gymnastics has gained recognition as a valuable element amongst the various therapeutics at the back and call of the physician.

Previously to Ling's death in 1839, two state institutions were founded in Stockholm—the Central Gymnastic Orthopedic Institute, 1827, in which Ling's medical gymnastics has been chiefly developed. These institutions give free instruction to a number of medical Swedish students and qualified foreign Doctors of Medicine, provided the latter are able to follow the lectures which are given in the Swedish language. When also, for the admittance of the Swedish pupils the standard of education and physical development can be made as high as may be desirable and as only about one-fourth of the Swedish applicants for each course are accepted, it should be clear that the Swedish medical gymnastics is in all probability competent to fulfill his calling.

It is a law of nature that movement is progress and life and that inactivity is decay and death. Physical exercise is as necessary for the comfort of the body as of the mind, it is essential for a rational development for the preservation of health and for its restoration when lost. Everyone should devote some part of the day to systematic bodily exercise in one form or another. But, whatever form of exercise is chosen should provide a suitable amount of work for all the different parts of the organism.

The muscular system constitutes as a rule six-tenths, or a little more than one-half, of the body's weight. The resting muscles contain about one-third of the blood in the body, but when thrown into activity they take two-thirds of the blood. The importance of this will be seen in the following facts. Within the body a kind of combustion or transformation of the body's substance is continually taking place. This is a comparatively slow process and requires an ample supply of atmospheric oxygen for its continuance. It takes place in all the tissues, but most vigorously in the muscles. Through muscular exercise the separation of the used-up parts of the body is hastened, and this produces an increased activity of the special organs for ridding the body of these waste matters, namely, the kidneys, the skin, and the lungs.

By physical exercise the demand for nourishment is increased, the whole vitality is quickened, the above mentioned combustion is promoted, and a sense of fatigue, which is natural and physiological, is the consequence. This is the case only when the physical exercise is kept within the limits necessary for the production of beneficial results. If it is too prolonged, a too vigorous expenditure of material takes place, the sense of fatigue becomes pathological and the organism is injured. On the other hand, too little exercise results in unhealthy or pathological conditions. From this we learn how very important is a right amount of physical exercise for all the functions of life.

Health depends upon the purity and richness of the blood; its purity and richness in turn depending upon the vigor of the blood-forming and blood-cleansing organs.

Most immediately important are the lungs, organs exercising a double function, which may be simply explained as follows: The blood passing through them is aerated by absorbing the oxygen inhaled with the air, while carbon-dioxide, that poisonous waste which we may call the coal-ash of the body, is eliminated. To function properly and to the best advantage the thorax, that bony cage enclosing the lungs, must be not only roomy, but flexible.

It is not sufficient to possess an extraordinary large chest, the joints of which may be ossified and stiff. To ensure a continued good health the joints of the thorax should be pliable, allowing the lungs to expand and fill with oxygen-laden air at inhalation, also allowing the lungs to be contracted upon exhalation and drive the used-up and poisonous air more completely out of the system. As the uneducated chest is usually flat and inclined to rigidity, and as the most important organs lie within the chest, the gymnastic course is begun by teaching the

pupil to breathe correct physiologically in such a way as leads to the vigorous oxygenation of the blood.

It may be fitting in this place to cite a great American authority on the subject of respiration, Albert Abrams, M. D.: "In man, the diaphragm predominates over the (ribbing) muscles, and the reverse is the case in women; hence, the normal type of respiration in man is abdominal and in women, costal."

"When the type of respiration is reversed it becomes the fundamental condition of many respiratory neuroses and accentuating the symptoms of organic affections of the lungs."

Correct breathing is of the utmost importance in the physical development and the greatest factor in evolving the noble arch of the chest and gaining control of the entire breathing apparatus.

This correct respiratory method has proved itself to act beneficially upon the heart, strengthening it and improving its muscular tone. When the muscles work certain substances are formed that pass into the blood and stimulate the respiratory center to greater activity. The increased breathing, which is the necessary consequence of this, further, in its turn, circulation. Since the actions of the heart are facilitated through movements, a diseased heart should, to a certain extent, be improved by such treatment. This is specially the case in diseases of the muscles of the heart, which latter are strengthened by medical gymnastics. But even in valvular lesions symptoms of failing compensation can be diminished by the gradually increased work given the heart. Heart-dilatation can also be diminished by facilitating the work of the heart-muscles. My personal experience, gained during several years of practicing medical gymnastics, shows that even if a gymnastic treatment in no case can free a patient from heart disease itself, every patient with heart disease will obtain relief from the troublesome symptoms of palpitation, shortness of breath, pain and oppression over the heart, with other symptoms that always accompany heart disease.

Passing from the chest, the improvement of the digestive system is the next consideration. The stomach, spleen, pancreas, liver and intestines are all benefited by gymnastics. This is proved by the increased appetite, quickened absorption, and regular and uniform action of the bowels, which always follows a judiciously carried out gymnastic course. It is an old gymnastic experience that if the abdominal muscles are well developed through gymnastic exercise, the intestinal muscles are strong too and perform their functions well. Even the

(Continued on page twelve.)

THE WORKER MUST BE WELL

In these days of sharp competition everyone who works should be kept up to the highest pitch of efficiency. The rewards of business life go to the clearest thinkers, to the men and women who know and do things better than other people.

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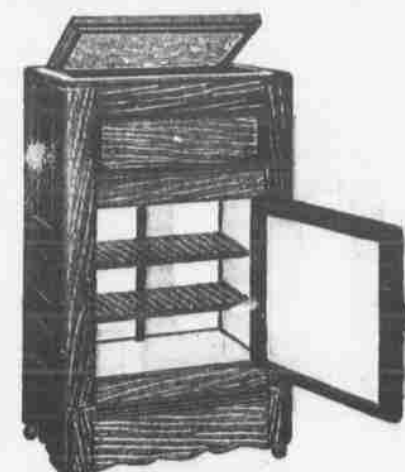
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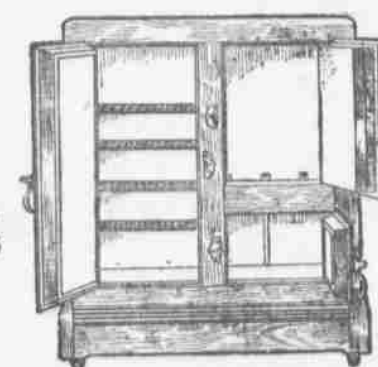
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